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ABSTRACT

A study investigated which experiences helped Japanese learners of English as a second language acquire native-like politeness strategies and how Japanese businessmen perceive the relationship between degrees of indirectness and politeness in Japanese and in English. Subjects were 22 adult males, including 17 native speakers of Japanese working for large businesses and living in Japan or the United States, and a comparison group of 5 native speakers of American English working in a large American firm. The subjects completed discourse completion tasks and a questionnaire. The discourse completion tasks involved refusals, giving embarrassing information, and disagreement in interactions between lower- and higher-status colleagues. Responses revealed patterns both within and across cultural groups. It is concluded that living experience in the target culture helped learners acquire native-like pragmatic competence, and that the Japanese and American businessmen shared an understanding of the relationship between degrees of politeness and directness. All valued their native norms in speaking to higher-status colleagues. Contains 18 references. The questionnaire is appended. (MSE)

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Politeness Strategies in the Workplace: Which Experiences Help Japanese Businessmen Acquire American English Native-like Strategies?

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Politeness Strategies in the Workplace: Which Experiences Help Japanese Businessmen Acquire American English Native-like Strategies?

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Discourse completion tests (DCT) and questionnaire were answered by 22 male speakers of American English and Japanese in order to answer the questions of 1) which experiences help Japanese business people acquire target-like politeness strategies and 2) how Japanese business people perceive the relationship between degrees of indirectness and politeness in Japanese and in English. Although many research studies show the pragmatic differences between languages, this study shows that in business settings, interestingly, male speakers of American English and Japanese perceive politeness strategies in a similar way. Furthermore, the results show that if learners are exposed to specific experience, they have more chances to acquire target-like politeness expressions rather than transferring their native pragmatics.

Acquiring pragmatic competence, especially politeness expressions in the target language, is very challenging for non-native speakers. Researchers have studied politeness strategies and have shown a number of reasons why cross-cultural misunderstandings may occur: for example, pragmatic transfer of one's native language into a foreign language (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Welts 1990), social norms (Chen 1993), and relationships between indirectness and politeness (Blum-Kulka 1987). However, according to Ellis (1994), it is not well known how learners acquire the "rules of pragmatics." To address this view, the first question in this study was; which experiences help Japanese businessmen with high levels of ESL proficiency to acquire target like politeness expressions? In other words, when do Japanese businessmen with high levels of ESL proficiency develop the ability to use target-like politeness expressions instead of transferring them from their first language?

In Japanese, indirect speech is characteristic of polite interaction (Clancy 1990). Therefore, it is important to study the relationship between degrees of indirectness and politeness when we study Japanese. The second question was: how do native speakers of Japanese perceive the relationship

between degrees of indirectness and politeness in Japanese and in English? I hoped that the answers to these questions would lead me to a new approach for teaching politeness expressions.

Pragmatics sociolinguistic competence and politeness

It is difficult to teach second language learners sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistic competence is viewed by Olshtain (1993) as the ability to interact in culturally as well as pragmatically appropriate ways. If non-native speakers transfer their native language pragmatics and/or cultural norms into the target language, their utterances may not achieve their goals due to sociolinguistic inappropriateness.

According toThomas (1983), although we can judge the grammatical competence of a speaker by prescriptive rules, such as knowledge of intonation and phonology, pragmatic competence cannot be clearly judged as correct or incorrect according to prescriptive rules. "Pragmatic failure" is a situation in which a speaker cannot express himself/herself in a socioculturally appropriate manner; this is not a situation in which a speaker constructs a grammatically incorrect sentence(Thomas 1983: 94). Thomas further explains that a cross-cultural "pragmatic failure" resulting from sociolinguistic transfer, such as social norms, is a more complicated matter than that resulting from linguistic transfer, such as semantics.

Politeness expressions have been studied by second language researchers in order to describe how native speakers talk (Beebe 1988). Native speakers have been not only exposed to particular situations where politeness is expressed, but also have been told what forms to use in those situations (Schmidt 1993). But non-native speakers may have difficulty in expressing politeness appropriately without any instruction, especially if politeness in the target language is not expressed in the same way as in the native language.

Why are politeness expressions difficult to learn?

The early study by Brown and Levinson (1978) demonstrated the universality of politeness expressions, but state that, there were two difficulties in expressing politeness 1) the degree of expressing clear meanings (on record), and 2) the degree of expressing no coerciveness (off record). One compromise for the above two difficulties is the "conventionalized indirectness." Indirect sentences whose meanings are conventionally understood, such as "can you pass the salt?" can satisfy the above two degrees.

Responding to Brown and Levinson (1978), Blum-Kulka (1987) makes a different argument about conventional indirectness. She argues that conventional indirectness is derived from a balanced relationship between "pragmatic clarity" and "apparent noncoerciveness." Pragmatic clarity involves the need for clear expressions, and apparent noncoerciveness is the need to avoid forcing actions. Conventional indirectness may seem impolite if needs for pragmatic clarity and apparent noncoerciveness are

not satisfied at the same time. For example, if the degree of pragmatic clarity is stronger in conventional indirectness, the sentence will sound impolite because of its directness. On the other hand, if the degree of apparent noncoerciveness is stronger in conventional indirectness, the sentence also will seem impolite because the speaker's intention will not be clear.

Results of studies of politeness between native speakers and non-native speakers

Pragmatic transfer of one's native language into a foreign language can be one of the reasons for cross-cultural misunderstandings. Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Welz (1990) study how expressions of refusal differ between native speakers of American English and Japanese speakers of English. The study clearly shows that Japanese speakers of English transfer their native pragmatics into the order, frequency, and content of refusal in English. The followings are typical components of refusals in the study.

Components of refusal made by American English speakers:
1) a statement of positive feeling
2) regret
3) specific excuses

Components of refusal made by Japanese speakers of English
—To higher status:
1) regret
2) vague excuses

—To lower status:
1) empathy
2) vague excuses

(Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz 1990)

Beebe, et al. conclude that these differences are pragmatic transfer from Japanese into English. For example, the order of refusal is not the same between American speakers and Japanese speakers in English. American speakers of English tend to express positive opinions at the beginning of their sentences; however, Japanese speakers of English seldom do so. Secondly, the authors find that Japanese speakers of English tend to make vague excuses to the speaker, but American English speakers tend to make more specific excuses to the speaker.

It is very difficult to analyze the degree of politeness or impoliteness in indirect expressions; as they can be perceived differently according to different cultures. The use of hints plays an important role in determining politeness or impoliteness of sentences. Indirect expressions, such as hints, may be perceived as impolite because of their lack of clarity (Blum-Kulka 1987). Beebe and Takahashi (1989a, b) studied polite expressions of "giving embarrassing information" and "disagreement" in English made by Japanese ESL learners. In the case of a higher status speaker talking to lower status interlocutor, Japanese tend to give a hint or a suggestion related to the embarrassing information rather than reporting the embarrassing information. In the case of a lower status speaker talking to a higher status interlocutor, Japanese ESL learners sometimes ask questions as a hint of

disagreement because Japanese perceive direct disagreement as impolite. While, on the other hand, they found that Americans also ask questions, which clearly indicate disagreement.

Social norms could be one of the reasons for cross-cultural misunderstandings. Chen (1993) shows responses to compliments are different according to social norms and self-image. She studied how American English speakers and Chinese speakers respond to compliments in their native languages. According to this study, American English speakers tend to respond in English to compliments with strategies of acceptance, returning, deflection, and rejecting. On the other hand, Chinese speakers tend to respond in Chinese to compliments with strategies of rejection, thanks + denigration, and acceptance (Chen 1993: 56). The study concludes that the social norms of America and China reflect on the responses to compliments. In American culture, the norm in this situation is to meet the complimenter's positive face needs and to think positively about oneself. But, in Chinese culture, the norm in this situation is to appear humble, although this does not mean Chinese speakers do not think positively of themselves.

Some pragmatic difficulties in polite expressions for Japanese speakers of English

Politeness expressions are deeply related to cultural norms, so it can be difficult to understand them cross culturally. In Japanese, indirect speech is one of characteristics of polite interactions. Clancy (1990) illustrates how communicative styles are acquired in Japanese. In conversations between Japanese mothers and their children, the mothers try to teach their children to read behind the polite statements of other people. For example, in hostess-guest routines, when a guest says "Oh, I have had enough," with the meaning "I do not want to eat any more," the mother explains to her child, who had persisted in offering food, that "She says she does not want to eat any more" (Clancy 1990: 29-30). By explaining the underlying meaning of the utterance, the mother teaches her child to understand indirect speech as polite expressions of strong feeling or wishes with which the child needs to comply. Through this kind of conversation practice, Japanese children gradually acquire the intended meanings of indirect speech.

In Japanese, indirect speech and polite expressions are strongly related. However, a study by Blum-Kulka (1987) shows that the degree of "directness and indirectness" does not correlate with the degree of "politeness and indirectness." Blum-Kulka (1987) explains that in English, the most indirect expressions, hints, are considered a polite way of making a request, but less polite than conventional indirect expressions. While in Hebrew, the most indirect expressions, hints, are not very polite expressions. Thus, it is important to study how Japanese perceive degrees of indirectness and politeness in Japanese and in English.

Beebe et al. (1990), Beebe and Takahashi (1989a, b) and Takahashi and Beebe (1993) focus their studies on the notion of status playing an important role in Japanese polite expressions. They found that Japanese change

politeness strategies according to status differences. On the other hand, Americans tend not to make distinction based on status.

How do non-native speakers acquire politeness expressions?

It is difficult to find how non-native speakers acquire target-like pragmatic expressions. Language proficiency can affect process of acquiring pragmatic expressions. Takahashi and Beebe (1993), Beebe and Takahashi (1989 a, b) point out that 1) lower-proficiency students are not fluent enough to transfer their native pragmatics into the target language, 2) if learners acquire highly proficient levels of the target language, they have enough control over English to express the norms of Japanese politeness. However, I assume there must be one more stage, that is, the stage at which learners acquire the ability to utter target-like politeness expressions.

Schmidt (1993) emphasizes that conscious learning of pragmatics is more effective than learning without consciousness pragmatic awareness. Pragmatics in the target language is not fully acquired by simple exposure to sociolinguistically appropriate input because learners may not notice pragmatic functions correctly. Thus, learners must pay attention to pragmatic features in order to master them.

Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) also conclude through their study of expressing gratitude in the target language that one of the reasons for poor performance in using politeness expressions is a lack of social interaction. The more exposure a learner has to conversations that contain pragmatic features, the easier it is for him or her to use them properly. The more social interaction learners experience, the more they acquire social appropriateness.

The learning period is also one of the factors in acquiring sociolinguistic elements. Swain and Lapkin (1990) also show in their study that early immersion students who start learning French at younger age acquire more target-like sociolinguistic behavior than the late immersion students, who start learning French at older age.

Having reviewed these points of several studies, now I now return to the two questions posed earlier. The first question, "Which experiences help Japanese businessmen with high levels of proficiency in ESL develop their ability to use target like polite expressions instead of transferring them from their native language?" tries to find answers by contrasting different experiences of Japanese bsuiness people using English in business settings. In order to study the acquisition of pragmatic competence, I especially focused on pragmatic transfer, indirect expressions, social norms and status differences. The second question is "How do native speakers of Japanese perceive the relationship between degrees of indirectness and politeness in Japanese and in English?"

Methodology

Following Cohen and Olshtain (1981), desired data are obtained if one's

Table 1.Groups of Respondents, English Experiences, and Languages in Questionnaire.

Group Name	n=	Native L	Firm	Rresidency	L used in questionnaire
JJJ	5	Japanese	Japan	Japan	Japanese
JJE	5	Japanese	Japan	Japan	English
JAE	5	Japanese	Japan	US	English
AAE	2	Japanese	US/UK	US	English
AE	5	English	US	US	English
Total	22	-	-	-	-

backgrounds are socioculturally comparable, so the respondents' age, socioeconomic level and academic background were controlled for. Thus, Japanese respondents were chosen who were young and had working experience in large business companies in which they spoke English. In order to see which experiences help Japanese business people to acquire native-like pragmatics, I made three groups according to the location of the firms and current residency: Japanese who are working for big business firms in Japan (JJE), Japanese who work/worked for big business firms in Japan, and currently are living in the US (JAE), and Japanese who work/worked for big business firms in English speaking countries, and currently are living in English speaking countries (AAE). By dividing the respondents in this way, it is possible to focus on the affects of the period of exposure to English, social interaction with native speakers of English, and language proficiency.

Furthermore, in order to study pragmatic transfer into the target language, social norms, and the degree of directness and indirectness, it was necessary to ask native speakers of English and Japanese to answer the questionnaire in their native languages. Therefore, I distributed the same questionnaires to native speakers of American English who work for one of the big American production firms (AE), and asked Japanese who work for one of the big Japanese trading firms (JJJ) to answer the questionnaires in Japanese. In the latter case, I translated the questionnaire into Japanese.

I distributed questionnaires to respondents by fax or e-mail from Philadelphia to offices or houses in Japan or in the US. Twenty two responses were received (Table 1).

I made the topic and settings related to office environments because it was necessary to select incidents that carry the same weight across cultures (Cohen and Olshtain 1981). The questionnaire consisted of three parts. In part one, the questions were related to work experiences and the period of exposure in English speaking countries (respondents' Background). In part two, I utilized the discourse completion test (DCT) that many researchers have used (see e.g. Beebe & Takahashi,1989, Chen 1993). There were eight questions in this part. DT situations were categorized into 1) refusals to invitations, 2) responses to compliments, 3) giving embarrassing infor-

Table 2.Six Sentences in the study of Degrees of directness and politeness

Degree of directness: categories and examples
—1—
The most direct
1) Mood derivable
ex) Clean up your desk.
2) Want statements
ex) I want you to clean up your desk.

—2—
In Between
3) Hedged performative
ex) I would like to ask you to clean up your desk.
4) Query preparatory
ex) Could you clean up your desk?

—3—
The least direct
5) Strong hints
ex) Your desk looks full of papers.
6) Mild hints
ex) We can not concentrate working in a messy office.

mation and 4) disagreement. Each category had two questions: one was to a higher status colleague and the other to a lower status colleague. It is important to mention here one traditional DCT disadvantage; the respondents may not respond in the same way that they actually speak (Beebe and Takahashi 1989b, Eisenstein and Bodman 1986). In order to compensate for this disadvantage, I added blanks for respondents to comment why they answer accordingly, but this comment was optional. In part three, the relationship between degrees of directness and politeness was studied (degrees of directness and politeness). In this part, six sentences in English or five sentences in Japanese which express a need to clean one's desk were given. Respondents were asked to rank sentences according to the degree of politeness and indirectness. I borrowed the categories from by Blum-Kulka (1987: 136-137) (Table 2).

These sentences were placed randomly in the questionnaire. In the Japanese language questionnaire, sentence 2 was omitted because Japanese does not have a similar expression to the "want statement" in conversation.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 shows the respondents' background. There were 22 answers, 17 were Japanese and 5 were native speakers of American English. All of the respondents were male. The average working experience was 6.5 years. Most of the respondents started working right after they had graduated from college. Among JJEs, JAEs and AAEs (who answered in English) 74% of them spoke English in the office. Furthermore, 67% received English language training during or before working, and 75% of them practiced

Table 3. Respondents' background

Questions for all respondents (n=22)	
Questions	Answers
Sex	Male: 22 Female: 0
Nationality	Japanese: 17 American: 5
Working experience (years)	6.5 years (on average)
Questions only for JJEs, JAEs and AAEs (n=12)	
Questions	Answers
How often do you speak English in the office?	Always (0%), Most of the time (33%), Some of the time (41%), Not at all (26%)
Did you receive business English training?	Yes (67%) 3 years (8%), 6 months (25%), 3 months (34%) No (33%)
What did you study during the business English training?	Business conversation (75%), Others (25%); (writing, vocabulary, discussion)
How long did you stay in English speaking countries?	JJE (4 months), JAE (1.8 years), AAE (4 years) (on average)

business conversation during the training. The JJEs had lived in English speaking countries for four months on average, JAEs 1.8 years on average, and AAEs four years on average. Almost 70% of Japanese who answered the questionnaire in English had studied business conversation and actually experienced business English in their offices on a regular basis. Please see Table 2 for further details.

Refusals

In this section, I will examine the DCT. First, I will compare answers by AEs and JJJs, then attempt to answer the first question: which experiences help Japanese business ESL speakers to acquire target-like politeness expressions.

Refusals were studied in DCT situations 1 and 5 (see appendix). In both situations, all the respondents, Japanese as well as American business people, refused the invitation similarly.

Lower status speaker talking to higher status colleague

In this situation, the respondents were asked to refuse their boss's invitation to a private party. Table 4 shows patterns of refusals according to groups.

Americans (AEs) refused the invitation with unclear excuses, such as "Unfortunately, I have a previous appointment. So, I will miss your party, but I do appreciate the gesture." This is in contrast to the study conducted by Beebe et al. (1990) in which the typical refusal made by American English speakers tends to consist of 1) positive opinions, 2) regret and 3) specific excuses. I found that all the AEs made vague excuses in order to refuse the invitation. This difference may exist only in business settings, in which American business people may not say specific excuses in office settings.

All JJJs (who answered in Japanese) made refusals in the same ways, that is, regret/apology, unclear excuses and refusals, such as "Excuse me, but I can't come because I have a previous appointment," (written in Japanese). However, there were no positive opinions which AEs added. In terms of excuses, most JJJs respondents used "Senyaku" (previous appointments) which is a fixed term in Japanese for refusals. Comparing JJJs and AEs, both of them answered with unclear excuses in their responses. Interestingly, both Americans and Japanese business people regard vague excuses as appropriate to use in refusing the invitation.

The refusals made by JJEs (who live in Japan) resembled answers made by JJJs. For example JJEs answered, "Thanks, but I have another appointment," which is shorter than answers by Japanese who live in the US (JAEs and AAEs). JAEs and AAEs tended to add comments in refusing the invitation such as, "I'm sorry, but I have a prior appointment. I will miss your party, but thank you," which seemed similar to answers by AEs. In this case, we could say that Japanese who lived in the target culture longer acquired more native-like pragmatics.

In terms of excuses, all the respondents except one (JAE) gave vague excuses, such as "a previous appointment" rather than specific excuses, such as "a funeral." It is not clear why almost all the respondents in this study answered with vague excuses. Once again, this may be because it was a business setting and people try not to have too much personal conversation in the office across cultures.

Higher status speaker talking to lower status colleague

In this situation, the respondents had to refuse an invitation to play golf from a vendor. According to Beebe et al. (1990), higher status Japanese tend to reject lower status interlocutors in Japanese and English with 1) empathy and 2) vague excuses. However, actual answers in this study did not display empathy. Rather, Japanese who responded in Japanese (JJJs) rejected the offer with the excuse that it was against the company's rules to play golf with vendors. Americans (AEs) rejected by mentioning the fact that accepting a gift of this kind is against the law. These were skillful ways of making a rejection in this situation. By giving excuses in these ways, the respondents were able to reject the offer reasonably rather than by giving vague excuses. On the other hand, some respondents, both Americans and Japanese, commented in the questionnaire that they should refuse this suggestion clearly because this situation may affect business. In this situation, business people may think that telling the fact directly is a polite way in refusing the invitation posed by the vendor.

Generally, Japanese and American respondents used similar refusal expressions in DCT situations 1 and 5. It is possible that in business settings, business people may share the same notions of politeness irregardless of the country. Therefore, it is difficult to categorize typical refusal expressions according to language.

Figure 1. Contents of responses to compliments) n=22
*** Tkg + Cs = Thanking plus Comments (N =22)**

Responses to compliments

Responses to compliments were studied in situations 2 and 3. In these situations, respondents were asked to respond to each compliment given by their assistant and boss. Most of the responses were almost the same. About 90% of the answers contained an expression of gratitude and/or comments about the compliments. However, the content of comments were not the same between Americans and Japanese as we will see below.

Lower status speaker talking to higher status colleague.

The respondents were asked to reply to the following compliment from their boss: "Your presentation was very good." One of the Americans (AEs) answered, "Thank you, I respect your opinion so your praise means a lot to me." One of the JJJs (who answered in Japanese) answered, "Thank you very much. I spent a lot of time preparing for my presentation." Although the type of responses were similar among Japanese and Americans, the content of the comments was not similar. Four AEs out of five added comments which showed positive opinions. On the other hand, 10 out of 12 comments answered by JJJs, JJEs, JAEs and AAEs expressed humbleness in their comments. For example, one Japanese who answered in English (JJE) answered, "Thank you. Actually, the profit sharing this year worked out better than last year, so luckily, I was able to make a good presentation." Also, another Japanese who answered in Japanese (JJJ) gave a comment that it is better not to be too proud. In the Japanese norm, humble expressions are accepted as responses to compliments rather than positive replies such as "Thank you, maybe we can discuss it further over lunch," which was one of the responses by AEs.

Humbleness and positive comments in this study can be related to the results discussed by Chen (1993). The American norm is to be positive to speakers, which is termed as the "Agreement Maxim," and the Japanese norm treats humbleness as an important part of self-image, which is called the "Modesty Maxim" (Chen 1993: 66-68). This result shows that business people tend to show norms in their native language, that is Japanese business people express humbleness in their replies to their boss's compliments, and American business people comment positively in their replies to their boss's compliments. Furthermore, it is possible to say that Japanese ESL business people tended to express the Japanese norm in this situation rather than the American norm.

Higher status speaker talking to lower status colleague

The respondents were asked to reply to the compliment made by an assistant: "You look nice, I like your shirt," (situation 3). In this situation, all respondents answered in a similar pattern as in the situation from lower to higher status, however, the answers were shorter and simpler. In business settings, people may distinguish status when they respond to compliments. Although Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz (1990), Wolfson (1989) state that Americans tend not to change polite utterances according to different status, American business people in this study made simpler responses to their assistant than to their boss.

Giving embarrassing information

Giving embarrassing information was the focus of situations 4 and 7. Respondents were asked to tell their boss that he had ketchup on his cheek or to tell their assistant he/she had spinach in his/her teeth. I constructed situations similar to those in Beebe and Takahashi (1989a: 114-118) because I wanted to see if young Japanese business people in this study use "hints", such as, "did you have lunch with Popeye?" (Beebe and Takahashi 1989: 115) in expressing embarrassing information. On the contrary, most of the respondents answered with the same pattern, that is 1) I am sorry/Excuse me, and 2) you have ketchup/spinach/something on your cheek. However, the respondents changed their answers according to status.

In the situation lower status speaker talking to higher status colleague, all the respondents, except one JJE, specifically reported the fact that their boss had ketchup on his cheek. Fifteen out of 22 respondents said "ketchup." According to the comments in the questionnaire, they worried that their boss would be embarrassed later if they did not tell him about the ketchup on cheek.

In the situation higher status speaker talking to lower status colleague, all AEs and ten out of 16 Japanese respondents mentioned about the spinach on their assistant's teeth. However, six Japanese respondents did not say anything about the embarrassing situation. Some respondents commented that spinach was too small a matter to tell their assistant. There was only one "hint" in this study saying, "did you have spinach for lunch?"

Table 4. Refusals from a lower status to a higher status

Refuser Status lower to higher	Respondents	Answers
(situation 1) *	AE	regret + vague excuse + positive opinion (1) refusal + vague excuse (1) apology + refusal + vague excuse (1)
	JJJ	regret/apology + vague excuse + refusal(4)
	JJE, JAE, AAE	positive opinion + vague excuse (2) positive opinion + apology + vague excuse (2) apology + vague excuse (2) apology + refusal (1) apology + refusal + clear excuse + positive opinion (1)

* some of the respondents are omitted because they did not answer in a discourse style.

Table 5. Direct explanation and its example sentences: from lower to higher status

AE: explain the situation directly + personal comments

Ex. "I already tried a plan very much like that one and it just did not work out. If you have any other suggestions, I would be glad to listen to them."

JAE and AAE: explain the situation directly + personal comments

Ex. "Yes, I think this plan is worth doing, too. But I tried a bit similar plan before, and it turned out to be unsuccessful. But I still think it's worth trying to see if the plan you proposed would work."

Answers by JJEs: explain the situation directly

Ex. "I have already tried it and found to be not so good."

Answers by JJJs: Explain the situation directly

Ex. "We tried similar plan before, but it did not work. The plan needs revise."

Table 6."Want statements" answered by each group

	The Most Direct	In Between	The Most Indirect
JJJ	-	-	-
JJE	#5 (3 answers)	#5 (2 answers)	-
JAE	#5 (1 answer)	#5 (4 answers)	-
AAE	#5 (all respondents)	-	-
AE	#5 (all respondents)	-	-

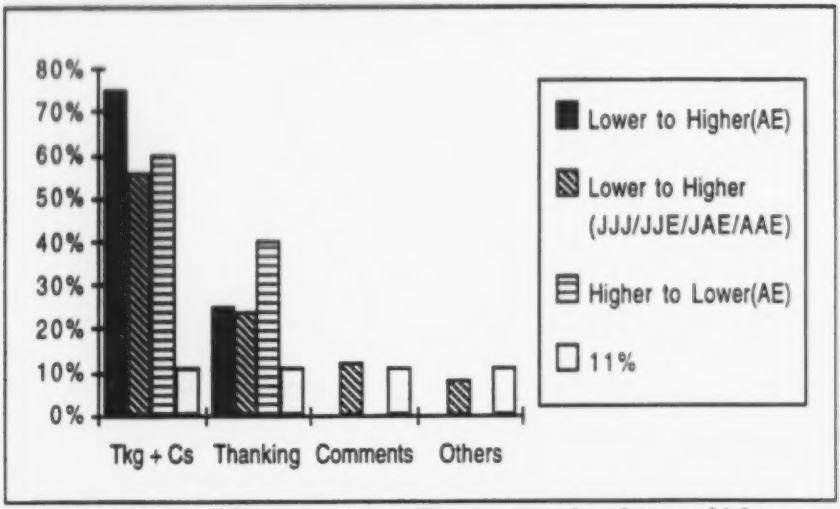

Figure 2. Ways of disagreement according to groups: from lower to higher status

*** Others = keep silent or tell a lie about having not read the plan yet.**

Direct/indirect expressions and status could be related in these situations. Telling about the situation directly to their boss might be considered more polite because the embarrassing situation might influence boss's status. In business settings, directness/indirectness and status may play an important role in polite expressions.

Disagreement

Lower status speaker talking to higher status colleague.

The respondents were also asked what to say to their boss when they found their boss's new plan was clearly wrong because the plan had been already tried before, and it did not work well (situation 6). There were two types of answers: 1) explaining the situation directly and 2) giving hints to let the boss know about the situation. Generally, Japanese and American business people seem to prefer disagreeing directly (see figure 2). In this situation, JAEs and AAEs who are living in the US seem to have acquired target-like expressions of disagreement to a greater degree than JJEs who are living in Japan (see Table 4).

All Americans (AEs) replied by explaining the situation directly, and added personal comments. The AEs tended to make personal comments in order to make polite expressions of disagreement which is also discussed by Beebe and Takahashi (1989a, b). On the other hand, JJJs (who answered in Japanese) answered in two types: (1) direct type and (2) hint type (see figure 2). JJJs hinted by replying, "I will bring the previous file which was

the same type of plan," or "I tried this plan. I will bring the file now" (Originally written in Japanese). Although these respondents knew that the plan did not work well, they did not mention it. Instead, the respondents tried to inform the boss about the fact by showing him the previous file.

While JJJs answered in two types, nine out of 11 answers written by JJEs, JAEs and AAEs were direct type, which is the same type as AEs. In other words, JJEs, JAEs and AAEs tended not to use hints in order to explain the situation to the boss. In the questionnaire, some respondents commented that they would tell the fact clearly because they did not want to waste time. In English, Japanese respondents (JAEs AAEs JJEs) tended to tell disagreement directly (see figure 2).

JAEs and AAEs (who are living in the US) tended to add personal comments after telling the fact directly, which is similar to answers by AEs(see in Table 4). By adding personal comments, responses becomes original. However, JJEs and JJJs (who are living in Japan) tended to tell only the fact. Without comments, responses sound less original. By stating disagreement with personal comments, JAEs and AAEs might express more target-like polite ways of disagreement than those by JJEs which do not have personal comments.

JJJ (Japanese who answer in Japanese) expressed disagreements in two types: disagreement with hints and directly. JJEs, on the other hand, JAEs and AAEs (Japanese who answer in English) seemed to prefer to disagree directly. Furthermore, JAEs and AAEs (who live in the US) seemed to have acquired target-like expressions of disagreement because they tended to express disagreement with personal and positive comments which is similar to expressions of AEs. Here, it is possible to say that exposure to the target culture can help ESL learners to acquire target-like pragmatics.

Higher status speaker talking to lower status colleague.

In situation 8, the respondents were asked to tell a subordinate that his proposal was not good. AEs and JJJs responded by telling problems or suggesting discussions about the plan. However, half of JJE, JAE and AAE answered in harsh ways, that is, telling the fact directly, such as the plan was not good at all.

Although AEs and JJJs suggested discussions in their responses, their responses were not the same way. One of the AEs responded, "Your plan seems very good, but there are some rough edges, maybe we could get together, and work out those rough edges together." JJJs tended to suggest discussion as hints for the problems, such as, "Please explain this point," and "Let's discuss it," (Originally written in Japanese). By asking for further "discussion" about the plan, the respondents were trying to convey the fact that the plan was not very good. AEs had already mentioned that the plan had problems before they suggested discussion. On the other hand, JJJs needed to understand that "discussion" meant that the plan had problems. This indirect expression is the typical Japanese norm, a hint strategy.

Six out of 12 JJEs, JAEs and AAEs (Japanese who wrote answers in English) replied with hint type, and six of them replied with direct expressions. These answers are different from the expressions by AEs and JJJs. Two of the direct expressions is, "unfortunately, I can't accept your plan because....," or "I must tell you my opinion about your plan...." Some respondents commented that, "since I do not want to waste time with the subordinate's plan, I will tell them directly."

In this situation, half of JJEs, JAEs and AAEs used hint strategy which JJJs also used. The other half of them criticized their subordinate's plan harshly, but JJJs seldom replied to their subordinate harshly. This result could be related to language stereotypes. As Beebe and Takahashi (1990) discuss, JJEs JAEs and AAEs might be instructed to speak with direct expressions in English.

The relationship between degrees of Directness and Politeness.

Americans (AEs) and Japanese who answered in Japanese (JJJs) shared the same degree of directness. Also, non-native speakers of English (JJEs, JAEs and AAEs) understood the target-like degrees of directness. However, in the answers of JJEs (Japanese living in Japan, who answered in English) and JAEs (Japanese living in America, who answered in English), "want statements" were not understood to the same degree as the AEs, and AAEs. In other words, Japanese who had less exposure to the target culture, did not understand "want statements" correctly while those Japanese who exposed to the target culture longer did. The reason for this result may be that in Japanese, there are no conversation expressions similar to "want statements," (see Table 4).

All respondents shared the same notions of directness and politeness both in English and Japanese. "Hedge performatives" and "query preparatory," the second direct sentences, were regarded as the most polite expressions. "Strong hints" and "mild hints," the most indirect sentences, were the secondary polite expressions. "Mood derivable" and "want statements," the most direct expressions, were regarded as the least polite expressions. The respondents might choose the second direct sentences as the most polite expressions because they perceived them as a balanced degree of directness and politeness (Brown & Levinson 1978).

If the second language has some expressions that their native language does not have, non-native speakers may not perform them well. Native speakers of Japanese in this study might find it difficult to understand the degree of directness and politeness of "want statements" in English since Japanese does not have the similar expression. However, all JAEs, who had 4 years of working experience in English speaking countries, understood the degrees of directness of "want statements." This result may show that the longer non-native speakers are exposed to the target culture, such as in business settings, the more they acquire target like pragmatics; furthermore, it also comments on the need to have an immersion like experience in order to acquire all forms.

Conclusion

In this study, there were two questions. One was to see which experiences help Japanese business ESL speakers to develop the ability to use target-like politeness expressions instead of transferring them from Japanese pragmatics. The second question was to see how Japanese speakers of English understand the relationship between degrees of directness and politeness.

Referring to the first question, the results of the situations refusals and disagreement suggests that living experience in the target culture helps learners to acquire target-like pragmatics. The respondents living in the English speaking countries developed ability to make their replies original, which Americans tend to prefer (Beebe and Takahashi 1989a,b). Furthermore, only Japanese who had work experience in English speaking countries understood English "want statements." These results suggest that Japanese who had less exposure to the target culture found it difficult to use English pragmatics and politeness expressions appropriately. In other words, the more specific experience learners are exposed to, the more they have chances to acquire the communicative competence.

For the second question, the results show that Japanese and American business men share an understanding of the relationship between degrees of directness and politeness despite the fact that indirectness and politeness are strongly related in Japanese (Clancy 1990).). As Blum-Kulka (1987) discusses, a "query preparatory" such as "Could you clean your desk?" was regarded as the most polite expression because the respondents balance degrees of directness and politeness.

However, the business people in this study valued their native norms in their responses when they responded to higher status business people. Most of Japanese respondents expressed humbleness in their comments, and most of American respondents made positive comments in their responds. In other words, Japanese ESL business people tended to express the Japanese norm in their responses to compliments made by their higher status people.

In this study, the respondents were carefully selected to be young business men at large companies; it is no coincidence that the respondents were male. It is possible to say that the results in this study are an indication of the politeness strategies which young American and Japanese executive male business people tend to use.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Part 1

Please answer the following questions and/or circle.

1) Sex; (male / female)

2) Nationality; (American / Japanese)

3) Working experiences; please fill in the blanks and circle.

(years) at (Japanese firm / American firm) in (Japan / America)

(years) at (Japanese firm / American firm) in (Japan / America)

Other working experiences; ( )

The following questions are only for native speakers of Japanese.

4) How often do/did you use English in your office? Please circle.

(Always / Most of the time / Some of the time / Not at all

5) a)Working experiences in English speaking countries; (years)

b) Did you take English language training before or during working? (Yes / No)

c) If yes, how long did you take training? ( )

d) What did you learn during the training? Please explain briefly.

Ex. Business conversation, Vocabulary.

( )

6) Have you ever lived in English speaking countries? (Yes / No)

If yes, how long? (Years)

Part 2

There are eight situations in this part. After each situation, please respond as you would in actual conversation. You may leave an answer blank if you think that you will not say anything in the situation. Please write comments or explanation for which you respond to situations if you think it is necessary.

Example.

During the lecture, the professor quotes a famous statements with wrong scholar name. What would you say?

You: leave blank

(Comments: I will not say anything in this situation because it is not good time to correct his mistakes.)

In the following situations, you are a young successful executive office worker at a main branch of one of the biggest firms in America.

(1) You are attending at a executive meeting for project X for which you are now working. At the end of this meeting, your boss invites you to his private party. But you can not make it. What would you say?

Boss: We will have a small party next Saturday. I would like to invite all of you in this meeting to this party. I hope you will be able to come with your partners.

You: [spacing reduced by editors]

(Comments:)

(2) Today, you made a presentation about the profit share in contrast with the previous year. Your presentation was successful, and your boss approaches to you.
Boss: Your presentation was very good. I was fascinated with your approach.
You: [spacing reduced by editors]

(Comments:)

(3) Today, what the company calls "casual day", is a day for casual attire. This morning, you put on casual clothes, and it is the first time that you try casual clothes in the office. Your assistant notices your clothes,
Assistant: Mr. A, you look so nice on your casual clothes. I really like your shirt.
You: [spacing reduced by editors]
(Comments:)

(4) You and your boss are having lunch at a cafeteria near your office. Your boss is in a hurry, and he has to leave now. You notice that your boss is about to leave with ketchup on his cheek.
Boss: I need to go now.
You: [spacing reduced by editors]
(Comments:)

(5) Your company has a plan to improve the computer system and you are in charge of this plan. You are comparing three computer companies to decide which one is the best. One of the computer companies invites you to play golf at the fanciest club this weekend, but you can not attend.
Salesman: If you are available this weekend, we would like to invite you to play golf at X club. I think it will be a wonderful opportunity to get to know each other in such a healthy setting.
You: [spacing reduced by editors]
(Comments:)

(6) A new boss has moved into your division. He proposes a new plan to you for your project, but you have already tried the same plan before and it turned out not to be good.

Boss: Did you read my new plan? I think it worth trying once.
You: [spacing reduced by editors]
(Comments:)

(7) It is one p.m. You are waiting for executives from Y company to have an important meeting. Your assistant comes to tell you that they have just arrived and s/he will be greeting them now. Then, you realize that you assistant has some spinach in her/his teeth.

Assistant: I will go to greet Mr. Z from Y company.
You: [spacing reduced by editors]

(Comments:)

(8) Your subordinate proposes a plan to you for the project you will deal with soon. Unfortunately, you are sure that this proposal will not work well. You need to tell him about this. Your subordinate comes into your office.
Your subordinate: Did you have time to look at my proposal?
You: [spacing reduced by editors]
(Comments:)

Part 3

There are six sentences/question, 1 to 6 below, which address cleaning the desk. Which sentence do you think is the most direct, or the most indirect way to ask (see QA)? Which sentence do you think is the most polite, or the least polite way to ask (see QB)? Please place the number of the sentences in the area of most appropriate for that sentences.

Situation: You find one of your co-workers' desk is quite messy. Then, you will say,
You: 1) I would like to ask you to clean up your desk.
2) Your desk looks full of papers.
3) Clean up your desk.
4) Could you clean up your desk?
5) I want you to clean up your desk.
6) We can not concentrate in working in messy office.

QA) The degrees of "Directness Indirectness" of the meaning.
The most direct sentence The most indirect sentence
(1 2 3 4 5 6)

QB) The degrees of "Politeness Inpoliteness" of the meaning.
The most polite sentence The least polite sentence
(1 2 3 4 5 6)